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The most representative and most publicized new comic strip is The Letter with a Chicken Feather, which uses 243 pictures to "give the Chinese children a patriotic education." The story concerns a young boy who, after receiving a Communist education, successfully fulfilled the "heroic" task of delivering an important message to anti-Japanese guerrilla forces It is claimed that more than 58,000 copies of The Letter with a Chicken Feather have been sold. (It was traditional practice to include a chicken feather with an urgent message to signify the letter's importance and the need for safekeeping.)

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E. Dance

China proper does not have any distinctive forms of dancing, although yang-ko is sometimes considered native to China. Yang-ko is a combination of singing and dancing derived from the song pattern of peasants who sing in groups antiphonically when working in the rice-fields. The dance steps revolve around a basic pattern, that is, two steps forward and one step back, which resembles the movement of the peasants as they work in the fields. In village festivals yang-ko is sometimes performed, but it became truly popular only after the reform of literature and art in 1942, when the Communists used the dance to propagate new ideas in Shensi and in North China. It was brought to different parts of China in time to greet the advancing People's Liberation Army. The opera The White-haired Girl was based on the singing and dancing forms of the yang-ko; and at the first stage of land reform this opera was utilized by the Communist

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cadres in many different parts of China to stir up class struggles in villages. The vogue of yang-ko in the Central-South Region now seems to be over. The sophisticated cadres seem to prefer the new operas to yang-ko, and the Western forms of social dancing to yang-ko steps.

The Chinese Communists have always fostered any art form that would assist their revolution. In 1950, Hsien Hsing-hai's Production Canta (Sheng-ch'an ta-ho-ch'ang) was transformed into an operatic spectacle. The new song-and-dance version is divided into four scenes, celebrating the time of spring cultivation, seeding, harvest, and prosperity, to portray the rural working people's enthusiasm for production and their prosperity as a result of the Communist "liberation."[23]

The Central Dance Corps at Peking, sponsored by the government, recently gave a "Lion Dance," which is an adaptation of a traditional festival dance performed in North China during the lunar New Year season.[24] Another dace, "Tea and Butterflies," has also been widely publicized; it concerns tea-gathering maidens in Western Fukien.[25] The purpose of these dances is to "beautify the working spirit" and to set a pattern to be developed by dance corps elsewhere in China.

The Cultural Corps (Wen-kung T'uan) of Central Institute of Nationalities at Peking has

23. People's Pictorial, August 1950.
24. Ibid., March 1954.
25. Ibid., April 1954.

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been visiting the minority communities in Southwest China, and has adapted some of the dances of the minority peoples for performance in Peking, in other Chinese cities, and abroad. Among those performed are a flute dance, a courtship dance, and a wedding dance of the Miao people, "Happy Sun," a tap dance, "Good Harvest," a traditional dance performed by Tibetans in Southwest China around the family cooking stove, "Please Stay, You Guests from Afar" of the Yi people, and the "Peacock Dance" of the Tai (Thai) people.[26] 535

The Central Experimental Opera Institute at Peking has also given instruction in ballet, and there are many aspiring ballerinas. Interest in ballet is unprecedented in China and is clearly the result of the popularity of ballet in Russia.[27] 535 177

The activities associated with dance are organized and directed by the government. There is the All-China Association of Dancers, which is a subdivision of the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Workers,[28] with its headquarters in Peking. Tai Ai-lien, a well-known professional dancer, heads the association. She has dedicated herself to the incorporation of folk life, especially that of the minority peoples into her dances. Her training, however, is Western. 535 658

F. Music

Appreciation of Western classical music has 533

26. Ibid., July 1954.
27. Ibid., July 1954.
28. The All-China Federation of Literary and Art Circles was changed to the All-China Federation of Literary and Art Workers in September 1953.